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Campbell's British Poetry.

Specimens of the British Poets: With Biographical and Critical Notices, and an Essay on English Poetry. By Thomas Campbell. Seven volumes. 8vo. London, 1819.

(From the Sixty Second Number of the Edinburgh Review, for March 1819.)

We would rather see Mr. Campbell as a poet, than as a commentator on poetry:—because we would rather have a solid addition to the sum of our treasures, than the finest or most judicious account of their actual amount. But we are very glad to see him in any way:—and think the Work which he has now given us very excellent and delightful.

The most common fault that is found with it, we think, is, that there is no little of its original,—and that out of seven volumes with Mr. Campbell's name on the outside, there should hardly be two little ones of his writing. In making this complaint, however, people seem to forget, that the Work is entitled '*Specimens of British Poetry*;' and that the learned Editor did not undertake to write, but only to select and introduce the citations of which it was to consist. Still, however, there is some little room for complaint: and the Work is somewhat deficient, even upon this strict view of its objects and of the promises which the title must in fairness be allowed to hold out. There is no doubt a very pleasing Essay on English Poetry,—and there are biographical and critical notices of many of its principal authors. But these two compartments of the Work are somewhat inartificially blended,—and the latter, and most important, rather unduly anticipated and invaded, in order to enlarge the former. The only biography or criticism which we have upon Dryden, for example, is contained in the Preliminary Essay;—and a considerable part even of the specimens of Shirley, are to be found in the same quarter. These however, are licences, or lyrical transitions, which must be allowed, we suppose to a poetical editor—and to which we should not therefore very much object. If the whole that we have a right to look for, is in the book, we are very little disposed to quarrel with the author about its arrangement, or the part of the book in which he has chosen to place it. But we really think, that we have not got all that we were naturally led to expect,—and that the learned author still owes us an arrear, which we hope he will handsomely pay up in the next edition.

When a great poet and a man of distinguished talents announces a large selection of English poetry, 'with biographical and critical notices,' we naturally expect such notices of all, or almost all the authors of whose Works he thinks it worth while to favour us with specimens. The biography sometimes may be unattainable—and it may still more frequently be uninteresting—but the criticism must always be valuable; and, indeed, is obviously that, which must be looked to, as constituting the chief value of any such publication. There is no author so obscure, if at all entitled to a place in this register, of whom it would not be desirable to know the opinion of such a man as Mr. Campbell—and none so mature and settled in fame, upon whose beauties and defects, and poetical character in general, the public would not have much to learn from such an authority. Now, there are many authors, and some of no mean note, of whom he has not condescended to say one word, either in the Essay, or in the notices prefixed to their citations. Of Jonathan Swift, for example, all that is here recorded is, 'Born 1667—died 1744;' and Otway is despatched in the same summary manner—'Born 1651—died 1685.' Marlowe is commemorated in a single page, and Butler in half of one. All this is rather capricious:—But this is not all. Sometimes the notices are entirely biographical, and sometimes entirely critical. We humbly conceive they ought always to have been of both descriptions. At all events, we think we ought in every case to have had some criticism,—since this could always have been had, and could scarcely have failed to be valuable. Mr. C., we think, has been a little lazy.

If he were like most authors, or even like most critics, we could easily have pardoned this; for we very seldom find any Work too short. It is the singular goodness of his criticisms that makes us regret their fewness; for

nothing, we think, can be more fair, judicious and discriminating, and at the same time more fine, delicate and original, than the greater part of the discussions with which he has here presented us. It is very rare to find so much sensibility to the beauties of poetry, united with so much toleration for its faults; and so exact a perception of the merits of every particular style, interfering so little with a just estimate of all. Poets, to be sure, are on the whole, we think, very indulgent judges of poetry; and that not so much, we verily believe, from any partiality to their own vocation, or desire to exalt their fraternity, as from their being more constantly alive to those impulses which it is the business of poetry to excite, and more quick to catch and to follow out those associations on which its efficacy chiefly depends. If it be true, as we have formerly endeavoured to show, with reference to this very author, that poetry produces all its greater effects, and works its more memorable enchantments, not so much by the images it directly presents, as by those which it suggests to the fancy, and melts or inflames us less by the fires which it applies from without, than by those which it kindles within, and of which the fuel is in our own bosoms, it will be readily understood how these effects should be most powerful in the sensitive breast of a poet, and how a spark, which would have been instantly quenched in the duller atmosphere of an ordinary brain, may create a blaze in his combustible imagination to warm and enlighten the world. The greater poets, accordingly, have almost always been the warmest admirers, and the most liberal patrons of poetry. The smaller only, your Laureates and Ballad-mongers, are envious and irritable, jealous even of the dead and less desirous of the praise of others, than avaricious of their own.

But though a poet is thus likely to be a gentler critic of poetry than another, and, by having a finer sense of its beauties, to be better qualified for the most pleasing and important part of his office, there is another requisite in which we should be afraid he would generally be found wanting, especially in a Work of the large and comprehensive nature of that now before us, we mean, in absolute fairness and impartiality towards the different schools or styles of poetry which he may have occasion to estimate and compare. Even the most common and miscellaneous reader has a peculiar taste in this way, and has generally erected for himself some obscure but exclusive standard of excellence, by which he measures the pretensions of all that come under his view. One man admires witty and satirical poetry, and sees no beauty in rural imagery or picturesque description; while another doats on Idyls and Pastorals, and will not allow the affairs of polite life to form a subject for verse. One is for simplicity and pathos; another for magnificence and splendour. One is devoted to the Muse of terror; another to that of love. Some are all for blood and battles, and some for music and moonlight—some for emphatic sentiments, and some for melodious verses. Even those whose taste is the least exclusive, have a leaning to one class of composition rather than to another; and overrate the beauties which fall in with their own propensities and associations, while they are palpably unjust to those which wear a different complexion, or spring from a different race.

But, if it be difficult or almost impossible to meet with an impartial judge for the whole great family of genius, even among those quiet and studious readers who ought to find delight even in their variety, it is obvious, that this bias and obliquity of judgment must be still more incident to one who, by being himself a Poet, must not only prefer one school of poetry to all others, but must actually belong to it, and be disposed, as a pupil, or still more as a master, to advance its pretensions above those of all its competitors. Like the votaries or leaders of other sects, poets have been but too apt to establish exclusive and arbitrary creeds, and to invent articles of faith, the slightest violation of which effaces the merit of all other virtues. Addicting themselves, as they are apt to do, to the exclusive cultivation of that style to which the bent of their own genius naturally inclines them, they look everywhere for those beauties of which it is peculiarly susceptible, and are disgusted if they cannot be found. Like discoverers in science, or improvers in art, they see nothing in the whole system but their own discoveries and improvements, and undervalue everything that cannot be connected with their own studies and glory. As the Chinese map-makers allot all the lodgeable area of the earth to their own nation, and thrust the other countries of the world into little outskirts and by- corners,—so poets are

disposed to represent their own little field of exertion, as occupying all the sunny part of Parnassus, and to exhibit the adjoining regions under terrible shadows and foreshortenings.

With those impressions of the almost inevitable partiality of poetical judgments in general, we could not recollect, that Mr. Campbell was himself a Master in a distinct school of poetry, and distinguished by a very peculiar and fastidious style of composition, without being apprehensive that the effect of this bias would be very apparent in his work, and that, with all his talent and discernment, he would now and then be guilty of great, though unintended injustice, to some of those whose manner was most opposite to his own. We are happy to say, that those apprehensions have proved entirely groundless; and that nothing in the volumes before us is more admirable, or to us more surprising, than the perfect candour and undeviating fairness with which the learned author passes judgment on all the different authors who come before him;—the quick and true perception he has of the most opposite and almost contradictory beauties—the good-natured and liberal allowance he makes for the disadvantages of each age and individual—and the temperance and brevity and firmness with which he represses the excessive severity of critics less entitled to be severe. No one indeed, we will venture to affirm, ever placed himself in the seat of judgment with more of a judicial temper—though, to soften invidious comparisons, we must beg leave just to add, that being called on to pass judgment only on the dead, whose faults were no longer corrigible, and had already been expiated by appropriate pains, his temper was less tried, and his severities less provoked, than in the case of living offenders—and that the very number and variety of the errors that called for animadversion, in the course of his wide survey, made each individual case appear comparatively insignificant, and mitigated the sentence of individual condemnation.

It is to this last circumstance of the large and comprehensive range which he was obliged to take, and the great extent and variety of the society in which he was compelled to mingle, that we are inclined to ascribe, not only the general mildness and indulgence of his judgments, but his happy emancipation from those narrow and liminary maxims by which we have already said that poets are so peculiarly apt to be entangled. As a large and familiar intercourse with men of different habits and dispositions never fails, in characters of any force or generosity, to dispel the prejudices with which we at first regard them, and to lower our estimate of our own superior happiness and wisdom, so, a very ample and extensive course of reading in any department of letters, tends naturally to enlarge our narrow principles of judgment, and not only to cast down the idols before which we had formerly abased ourselves, but to disclose to us the might and the majesty of much that we had mistaken and contemned.

In this point of view, we think such a Work as is now before us, likely to be of great use to ordinary readers of poetry—not only as unlocking to them innumerable new springs of enjoyment and admiration, but as having a tendency to correct and liberalize their judgments of their old favourites, and to strengthen and enliven all those faculties by which they derive pleasure from such studies. Nor would the benefit, if it once extended so far, by any means stop here. The character of our poetry depends not a little on the taste of our poetical readers;—and though some of our bards are before their Age, and some behind it, the greater part must be pretty nearly on its level. Present popularity, whatever disappointed writers may say, is, after all, the only safe presage of future glory;—and it is really as unlikely, that good poetry should be produced in any quantity where it is not relished, as that cloth should be manufactured and thrust into the market, of a pattern and fashion for which there was no demand. A shallow and uninstructed taste is indeed the most flexible and inconstant—and is tossed about by every breath of doctrine, and every wind of authority; so as neither to desire any permanent delight from the same works, nor to assure any permanent fame to their authors;—while a taste that is formed upon a wide and large survey of enduring models, not only affords a secure basis for all future judgements, but must compel, whenever it is general in any society, a salutary conformity to its great principles from all who depend on its suffrage.—To accomplish such an object, the general study of a Work like this certainly is not enough:—But it would form an excellent preparation for more extensive reading—and would, of itself, do much to open the eyes of many self-satisfied persons, and startle them into a sense of their own ignorance, and the poverty and paltriness of many of their ephemeral favourites. Considered as a nation, we are yet but very imperfectly recovered from that strange and ungrateful forgetfulness of our older poets which began with the Restoration, and continued almost unbroken till after the middle of the last century.—Nor can the works which have chiefly tended to dispel it among the instructed orders, be ranked in a higher class than this which is before us. Percy's Relics of Ancient Poetry produced, we believe, the first revulsion—and this was followed up by Warton's History of Poetry. Johnson's Lives of the Poets did something; and the great effect has been produced by the modern commentators on Shakespeare. These various works recommended the older writers, and reinstated them in some of their honours; but still the Works themselves were not placed before the eyes of ordinary readers. This was done in part, perhaps overdone, by the entire republication of some of our older dramatists—and with better effect by Mr. Ellis's Specimens. If the former, however, was rather too copious a supply for the returning appetite of the public, the latter was too scanty; and both were confined to too narrow a portion of time to enable the reader to enjoy the variety, and to draw the comparisons, by which he might be most pleased and instructed.—Southey's continuation of Ellis did harm rather than good; for though there is some cleverness in the introduction, the Work itself is executed in a crude

petulant and superficial manner, and bears all the marks of being a mere bookseller's speculation. As we have heard nothing of it from the time of its first publication, we suppose it has had the success it deserved.

There was great room therefore,—and we will even say, great occasion, for such a Work as this of Mr. Campbell's, in the present state of our literature; and we are persuaded, that all who care about poetry, and are not already acquainted with the authors of whom it treats—and even all who are cannot possibly do better than read it fairly through, from the first page to the last, without skipping the extracts which they know, or those which may not at first seem very attractive. There is no reader, we will venture to say, who will rise from the perusal even of these partial and scanty fragments, without a fresh and deep sense of the matchless richness, variety, and originality of English poetry: while the juxtaposition and arrangement of the pieces not only gives room for endless comparisons and contrasts, but displays, as it were in miniature, the whole of its wonderful progress, and sets before us, as in a great gallery of pictures, the whole course and history of the art, from its first rude and infant beginnings, to its maturity, and perhaps its decline. While it has all the grandeur and instruction that belongs to such a gallery, it is free from the perplexity and distraction which is generally complained of in such exhibitions; as each piece is necessarily considered separately and in succession, and the mind cannot wander, like the eye, through the splendid labyrinth in which it is enchanted. Nothing, we think, can be more delightful, than thus at our ease to trace, through all its periods, vicissitudes and aspects, the progress of this highest and most intellectual of all the arts—coloured as it is in every age by the manners of the times which produce it, and embodying, besides those flights of fancy, and touches of pathos, that constitute its more immediate essence, much of the wisdom, and much of the morality that was then current among the people; and thus presenting us, not merely with almost all that genius has ever created for delight, but with a brief chronicle and abstract of all that was once interesting to the generations which have gone by.

The steps of the progress of such an art, and the circumstances by which they have been affected, would form, of themselves, a large and interesting theme of speculation. Conversant as poetry necessarily is with all that touches human feelings, concerns, and occupations, its character must have been impressed by every change in the moral and political condition of society, and must even retain the lighter traces of their successive follies, amusements, and pursuits; while, in the course of age, the very multiplication and increasing business of the people have forced it through a progress not wholly dissimilar to that which the same causes have produced on the agriculture and landscape of the country; where at first we had rude and dreary wastes, thin sprinkled with sunny spots of simple cultivation—then vast forests and chases, stretching far around feudal castles and pinnacled abbeys—then woodland hamlets, and goodly mansions, and gorgeous gardens, and parks rich with waste fertility and lax habitations—and, finally, crowded cities, and road-side villas, and brick-walled gardens, and turnip fields, and canals, and artificial ruins, and ornamented farms, and cottages trellised over with exotic plants.

But to escape from those metaphors and enigmas, to the business before us, we must remark, that in order to give any tolerable idea of the poetry which was thus to be represented, it was necessary, that the specimens to be exhibited should be of some compass and extent. We have heard their length complained of—but we think with very little justice. Considering the extent of the Works from which they are taken, they are almost all but inconsiderable fragments; and where the original was of an Epic or Tragic character, greater abridgement would have been mere mutilation,—and would have given only such a specimen of the whole, as a brick might do of a building. From the earlier and less familiar authors, we rather think the citations are too short; and, even from those that are more generally known, we do not well see how they could have been shorter, with any safety to the professed object and only use of the publication. That object, we conceive, was to give specimens of English poetry, from its earliest to its latest periods; and it would be a strange rule to have followed, in making such a selection, to leave out the best and most popular. The work certainly neither is, nor professes to be, a collection from obscure and forgotten authors—but specimens of all who have merit enough to deserve our remembrance;—and if some few have such redundant merit or good fortune, as to be in the hands and the minds of all the world, it was necessary, even then, to give some extracts from them, that the series might be complete, and that there might be room for comparison with others, and for tracing the progress of the art in the strains of their models and their imitators.

In one instance, and one only, Mr. C. has declined doing this duty, and left the place of one great luminary to be filled up by recollections that he must have presumed would be universal. He has given but two pages to Shakespeare—and not a line from any of his plays. Perhaps he has done rightly;—a knowledge of Shakespeare may be safely presumed, we believe, in every reader; and, if he had begun to cite his Beauties there is no saying where he would have ended. A little book, calling itself Beauties of Shakespeare, was published some years ago, and shown, as we have heard, to Mr. Sheridan. He turned over the leaves for some time with apparent satisfaction, and then said, 'This is very well; but where are the other seven volumes?' There is no other author, however, whose fame is such as to justify a similar *ellipsis*, or whose works can be thus elegantly understood in a collection of good poetry. Mr. C. has complied perhaps too far with the popular prejudice, in confining his citations from Milton, to the *Comus* and the smaller pieces, and leaving the *Paradise Lost* to the memory of his readers. But though we do not think the extracts by any means too long on the whole, we are certainly of opinion, that some are too long and others

too short; and that many, especially in the latter case, are not very well selected. There is far too little of Marlowe for instance, and too much of Shirley, and even of Massenger. We should have liked more of Warner, Fairfax, Phineas, Fletcher, and Henry More, all poets of no scanty dimensions.—and could have spared several pages of Butler, Mason, Whitehead, Roberts, Meston, and Amhurst Selden. We do not think the specimens from Burns very well selected; nor those from Prior—nor can we see any good reason for quoting the whole *Castle of Indolence*, and nothing else, for Thomson—and the whole *Rape of the Lock*, and nothing else, for Pope.

Next to the impression of the vast fertility, compass, and beauty of our English poetry, the reflection that recurs most frequently and forcibly to us in accompanying Mr. C. through his wide survey, is that of the perishable nature of poetical fame, and the speedy oblivion that has overtaken so many of the promised heirs of immortality. Of near two hundred and fifty authors, whose Works are cited in these volumes, by far the greater part of whom were celebrated in their generation, there are not thirty who now enjoy any thing that can be called popularity—whose Works are to be found in the hands of ordinary readers—in the shops of ordinary booksellers—or in the press for republication. About fifty more may be tolerably familiar to men of taste or literature;—the rest slumber on the shelves of collectors, and are partially known to a few antiquaries and scholars. Now, the fame of a poet is popular, or nothing. He does not address himself, like the man of science, to the learned, or those who desire to learn, but to all mankind; and his purpose being to delight and be praised, necessarily extends to all who can receive pleasure, or join in applause. It is strange, and somewhat humiliating, to see how great a proportion of those who had once fought their way successfully to distinction, and surmounted the rivalry of contemporary envy, have again sunk into neglect. We have great deference for public opinion; and readily admit, that nothing but what is good can be permanently popular. But though its *vivat* be generally oracular, its *peret* appears to us to be often sufficiently capricious; and while we would foster all that it bids to live, we would willingly revive much that it leaves to die. The very multiplication of Works of amusement, necessarily withdraws many from notice that deserve to be kept in remembrance; for we should soon find it labour, and not amusement, if we were obliged to make use of them all, or even to take all upon trial. As the materials of enjoyment and instruction accumulate around us, more and more must thus be daily rejected, and left to waste: for while our tasks lengthen, our lives remain as short as ever; and the calls on our time multiply, while our time itself is flying swiftly away. This superfluity and abundance of our treasures, therefore necessarily renders much of them worthless; and the veriest accidents may, in such a case, determine what part shall be preserved, and what thrown away and neglected. When an army is *decimated*, the very bravest may fall; and many poets, worthy of eternal remembrance, have been forgotten, merely because there was not room in our memories for all.

By such a Work as the present, however, this injustice of fortune may be partly redressed—some small fragments of an immortal strain may still be rescued from oblivion—and a wreck of a name preserved, which time appeared to have swallowed up for ever. There is something pious we think, and endearing, in the office of thus gathering up the ashes of renown that have passed away; or rather, of calling back the departed life for a transitory glow, and enabling those great spirits which seemed to be *laid* for ever, still to draw a tear of a pity, or a throb of admiration, from the hearts of a forgetful generation. The body of their poetry, probably, can never be revived; but some sparks of its spirit may yet be preserved, in a narrower and feebler frame.

When we look back upon the havoc which two hundred years have thus made in the ranks of our immortals—and, above all, when we refer their rapid disappearance to the quick succession of new competitors, and the accumulation of more good Works than there is time to peruse,—we cannot help being dismayed at the prospect which lies before the writers of the present day. There never was an age so prolific of popular poetry as that in which we now live;—and as wealth, population and education extend, the produce is likely to go on increasing. The last ten years have produced, we think, an annual supply of about ten thousand lines of good staple poetry—poetry from the very first hands that we can boast of—that runs quickly to three or four large editions—and is as likely to be permanent as present success can make it. Now, if this goes on for a hundred years longer, what a task will await the poetical readers of 1919! Our living poets will then be nearly as old as Pope and Swift are at present—but there will stand between them and that generation nearly ten times as much fresh and fashionable poetry as is now interposed between us and those writers:—and if Scott and Byron and Campbell have already cast Pope and Swift a good deal into the shade, in what form and dimensions are they themselves likely to be presented to the eyes of their great-grand-children? The thought, we own, is a little appalling;—and we confess we see nothing better to imagine than that they may find a comfortable place in some new collection of Specimens—the centenary of the present publication. There—if the future editor have any thing like the indulgence and veneration for the antiquity of his predecessor—there shall posterity still hang with rapture on the half of Campbell—and the fourth part of Byron—and the sixth of Scott—and the scattered tythes of Crabbe—and the three *per cent.* of Southey,—while some good natured critic shall sit in our mouldering chair, and more than half prefer them to those by whom they have been superseded!—It is an hyperbole of good nature, however, we fear, to ascribe to them even these dimensions of the end of a century. After a lapse of 250 years, we are afraid to think of the space they may have shrunk into. We have no Shakespeare, alas! to shed a never-setting light on his contemporaries:—and if we continue to write and rhyme at the present rate for 200 years longer, there must be

some new art of short-hand reading invented—or all reading will be given up in despair. We need not distress ourselves, however, with these afflictions of posterity;—and it is quite time, that the reader should know a little of the Work before us.

The Essay on English Poetry is very cleverly, and, in many places, very finely written—but it is not equal, and it is not complete. There is a good deal of the poet's waywardness even in Mr. C.'s prose. His historical Muse is as disdainful of drudgery and plain work as any of her more tuneful sisters;—and so we have things begun and abandoned—passages of great eloquence and beauty followed up by others not a little careless and disorderly—a large outline rather meagerly filled up, but with some morsels of exquisite finishing scattered irregularly up and down its expanse—little fragments of detail and controversy—and abrupt and impatient conclusions. Altogether, however, the Work is very spirited; and abounds with the indications of a powerful and fine understanding, and of a delicate and original taste. We cannot now afford to give any abstract of the information it contains—but shall make a few extracts, to show the tone and manner of the composition.

After some very acute remarks on Mr. Ellis's opinions as to the origin of our present English, he gives a rapid and animated sketch of the ancient Romances, one part of which he sums up as follows.

'The reign of French metrical romance may be chiefly assigned to the latter part of the twelfth, and the whole of the thirteenth century; that of English metrical romance, to the latter part of the thirteenth, and the whole of the fourteenth century. Those ages of chivalrous song were, in the mean time fraught with events which, while they undermined the feudal system, gradually prepared the way for the decline of chivalry itself. Literature and science were commencing; and even in the improvement of the mechanical skill employed to heighten chivalrous or superstitious magnificence, the seeds of arts, industry, and plebeian independence were unconsciously sown. One invention, that of gun-powder, is eminently marked out, as the cause of the extinction of Chivalry; but even if that invention had not taken place, it may well be conjectured that the contrivance of other means of missile destruction in war, and the improvement of tactics, would have narrowed that scope for the prominence of individual prowess, which was necessary for the chivalrous character, and that the progress of civilization must have ultimately levelled its romantic consequence. But to anticipate the remote effects of such causes, if scarcely within the ken of philosophy, was still less within the reach of poetry. Chivalry was still in all its glory; and, to the eye of the poet, appeared as likely as ever to be immortal. The progress of civilization even ministered to external importance. The early arts made chivalrous life, with all its pomp and ceremonies, more august and imposing, and more picturesque as a subject for description. Literature, for a time, contributed to the same effect, by her jejune and fabulous efforts at history, in which the athletic worthies of classical story and of modern romance were gravely connected by an ideal genealogy: And thus the dawn of human improvement smiled on the fabric which it was ultimately to destroy, as the morning sun glids and beautifies those masses of frost work, which are to melt before its noonday heat.

'The elements of romantic fiction have been traced up to various sources; but neither the Scaldic, nor Sarcenic, nor Armenian theory of its origin can sufficiently account for all its materials. Many of them are classical, and others derived from the scriptures. The migrations of Science are difficult enough to be traced; but Fiction travels on still lighter wings, and scatters the seeds of her wild flowers imperceptibly over the world, till they surprise us by springing up with similarity in regions the most remotely divided. There was a vague and unselecting love of the marvellous in romance, which sought for adventures, like its knights errant, in every quarter where they could be found; so that it is easier to admit of all the sources which are imputed to that species of fiction, than to limit our belief to any one of them.' l. 26-30.

The following sketch of Chaucer, and of the long interregnum that succeeded, is likewise given with great grace and spirit.

'His first, and long continued predilection, was attracted by the new and allegorical style of romance, which had sprung up in France, in the thirteenth century, under William de Lorris. We find him, accordingly, during a great part of his poetical career, engaged among the dreams, emblems, flower-worshippings, and amatory parliaments, of that visionary school. This, we may say, was a gymnasium of rather too light and playful exercise for so strong a genius; and it must be owned, that his allegorical poetry is often puerile and prolix. Yet, even in this walk of fiction, and we never entirely lose sight of that peculiar grace and gaiety, which distinguish the Muse of Chaucer; and no one who remembers his productions of the House of Fame, and the Flower and the Leaf, will regret that he sported, for a season, in the field of allegory. Even his pieces of this description, the most fantastic in design, and tedious in execution are generally interspersed with fresh and joyous descriptions of external nature. In this new species of romance, we perceive the youthful Muse of the language, in love with mystical meanings and forms of fancy, more remote, if possible, from reality, than those of the chivalrous fable itself; and we could, sometimes, wish her back from her emblematic castles, to the more solid ones of the elder fable; but still she moves in pursuit of those shadows with an impulse of novelty, and an exuberance of spirit, that is not wholly without its attraction and delight. Chaucer was, afterwards, happily drawn to the more natural style of Boccaccio, and from him he derived the hint of a subject, in which, besides his own original portraits of contemporary life, he could introduce stories of every description, from the most heroic to the most familiar.' pp. 71-73.

'Warton, with great beauty and justice, compares the appearance of Chaucer in our language, to a premature day in an English spring; after which the gloom of winter returns, and the buds and blossoms, which have been called forth by a transient sunshine, are nipped by frosts and scattered by storms. The causes of the relapse of our poetry, after Chaucer, seem but too apparent in the annals of English history, which, during five reigns of the fifteenth century, continue to display but a tissue of conspiracies, proscriptions, and bloodshed. Inferior even to France in literary progress, England displays in the fifteenth century a still more mortifying contrast with Italy. Italy, too, had her religious schisms and public distractions; but her arts and literature had always a sheltering place. They were even cherished by the rivalry of independent communities, and received encouragement from the opposite sources of commercial and ecclesiastical wealth. But we had no Nicholas the Fifth, nor House of Medici. In England, the evils of civil war agitated society as one mass. There was no refuge from them, no enclosure to fence in the field of improvement, no mound to stem the torrent of public troubles. Before the death of Henry VI. it is said, that one half of the nobility and gentry in the kingdom had perished in the field, or on the scaffold.

'A circumstance, additionally hostile to the national genius, may certainly be traced in the executions for religion, which sprung up as a horrible novelty in our country in the fifteenth century. The clergy were determined to indemnify themselves for the exposures which they had met with in the preceding age; and the unhallowed compromise which Henry IV. made with them, in return for supporting his accession, armed them, in an evil hour, with the torch of persecution. In an age of persecution, even the living study of his own species must be comparatively darkened to the poet. He looks round on the characters and countenances of his fellow-creatures, and instead of the naturally cheerful and eccentric variety of their humours, he reads only a sullen and oppressed uniformity. To the spirit of poetry we should conceive such a period to be an impassable Avernus, where she would drop her wings and expire: And undoubtedly this inference will be found warranted by a general survey of the history of Genius.' pp. 79-84.

The golden age of Elizabeth has often been extolled, and the genius of Spenser delineated, with feeling and eloquence. But all that has been written, leaves the following striking passages as original as they are eloquent.

'In the reign of Elizabeth, the English mind put forth its energies in every direction, exalted by a purer religion, and enlarged by new views of truth. This was an age of loyalty, adventure, and generous emulation. The chivalrous character was softened by intellectual pursuits, while the genius of chivalry itself still lingered, as if unwilling to depart, and paid his last homage to a warlike and female reign. A degree of romantic fancy remained in the manners and superstitions of the people; and allegory might be said to parade the streets in their public pageants and festivities. Quaint and pedantic as those allegorical exhibitions might often be, they were nevertheless more expressive of erudition, ingenuity, and moral meaning, than they had been in former times. The philosophy of the highest minds still partook of a visionary character. A poetical spirit infused itself into the practical heroism of the age; and some of the worthies of that period seem less like ordinary men, than like beings called forth out of fiction, and arrayed in the brightness of her dreams. They had "High thoughts seated in a heart of courtesy." The life of Sir Philip Sidney was poetry put into action.

'The result of activity and curiosity in the public mind was to complete the revival of classical literature, to increase the importation of foreign books, and to multiply translations, from which poetry supplied herself with abundant subjects and materials, and in the use of which she showed a frank and fearless energy, that criticism and satire had not yet acquired power to overawe. Romance came back to us from the southern languages, clothed in new luxury by the warm imagination of the south. The growth of poetry under such circumstances might indeed be expected to be as irregular as it was profuse. The field was open to daring absurdity, as well as to genuine inspiration; and accordingly there is no period in which the extremes of good and bad writing are so abundant.' pp. 120-122.

'The mistaken opinion, that Ben Jonson censured the antiquity of the diction in the "Fairy Queen," has been corrected by Mr. Malone, who pronounces it to be exactly that of his contemporaries. His authority is weighty; still, however, without reviving the exploded error respecting Jonson's censure, one might imagine the difference of Spenser's style from that of Shakespeare's, whom he so shortly preceded, to indicate that his gothic subject and story made him lean towards words of the elder time. At all events, much of his expression is now become antiquated; though it is beautiful in its antiquity, and like the moss and ivy on some majestic building, covers the fabric of his language with romantic and venerable associations.'

'His command of imagery is wide, easy, and luxuriant. He threw the soul of harmony into our verse, and made it more warmly, tenderly, and magnificently descriptive, than it ever was before, or, with a few exceptions, than it has ever been since. It must certainly be owned, that in description he exhibits nothing of the brief strokes and robust power, which characterize the very greatest poets; but we shall so where find more airy and expansive images of visionary things, a sweeter tone of sentiment, or a finer flush in the colours of language, than in this Rubens of English poetry. His fancy teems exuberantly in minuteness of circumstance, like a fertile soil sending bloom and verdure through the utmost extremities of the foliage which it nourishes. On a comprehensive view of the whole work, we certainly miss the charm of strength, symmetry, and rapid or interesting progress; for, though the plan which the poet designed is not completed, it is easy to see, that no additional cantos could have rendered it less perplexed. But still there is a richness in his materials, even where their coherence is loose, and their disposition confused. The clouds of his allegory may seem to spread into shapeless forms, but they are still the clouds of a glowing atmosphere. Though his story grows desultory, the sweetness and grace of his manner still abide by him. We always rise from perusing him with melody in the mind's ear, and with pictures of romantic beauty impressed on the imagination.' pp. 124-127.

In his account of the great dramatic writers of that and the succeeding reign, Mr. C.'s veneration for Shakespeare, has made him rather unjust, we think, to the fame of some of his precursors. We have already said, that he

passes Marlowe with a very slight notice, and a page of citation. Greene, certainly a far inferior writer, is treated with the same scanty courtesy, and there is no account and no specimen of Kyd or Lodge, though both authors of very considerable genius and originality.—With the writings of Peele, we do not profess to be acquainted—but the quotation given from him in the Essay should have entitled him to a place in the body of the work.—We must pass over what he says of Shakespeare and Jonson, though full of beauty and feeling.—To the latter, indeed, he is rather more than just.—The account of Beaumont and Fletcher is lively and discriminating.

'The theatre of Beaumont and Fletcher contains all manner of good and evil. The respective shares of those dramatic partners, in the Works collectively published with their names, have been stated in a different part of these volumes. Fletcher's share in them is by far the largest; and he is chargeable with the greatest number of faults, although at the same time his genius was more airy, prolific, and fanciful. There are such extremes of grossness and magnificence in their drama, so much sweetness and beauty interspersed with views of nature either falsely romantic, or vulgar beyond reality; there is so much to animate and amuse us, and yet so much that we would willingly overlook, that I cannot help comparing the contrasted impressions which they make, to those which we receive from visiting some great and ancient city, picturesquely but irregularly built, glittering with spires and surrounded with gardens, but exhibiting in many quarters the lanes and hovels of wretchedness. They have scenes of wealthy and high life, which remind us of courts and palaces frequented by elegant females and high spirited gallants, whilst their noble old martial characters, with Caractacus in the midst of them, may inspire us with the same sort of regard which we pay to the rough-hewn magnificence of an ancient fortress.

'Unhappily, the same simile, without being hunted down, will apply but too faithfully to the nuisances of their drama. Their language is often basely profigate. Shakespeare's and Jonson's indelicacies are but casual blots; whilst theirs are sometimes essential colours of their painting, and extend, in one or two instances, to entire and offensive scenes. This fault has deservedly injured their reputation; and, saving a very slight allowance for the fashion and taste of their age, admits of no sort of apology. Their drama, nevertheless, is a very wide one and "has ample room and verge enough" to permit the attention to wander from these, and to fix on more inviting peculiarities—as on the great variety of their fables and personages, their spirited dialogue, their wit, pathos, and humour. Thickly sown as their blemishes are, their merit will bear great deductions, and still remain great. We never can forget such beautiful characters as their Cellide, their Aspatia and Bellario, or such humorous ones as their La Writ and Cacafofo. Awake they will always keep us, whether to quarrel or to be pleased with them. Their invention is fruitful; its beings are on the whole an active and sanguine generation; and their scenes are crowded to fulness with the warmth, agitation, and interest of life.' pp. 210-213.

Some of the most splendid passages in the Essay are dedicated to the fame of Milton—and are offerings not unworthy of the shrine.

'In Milton,' he says, 'there may be traced obligations to several minor English poets; but his genius had too great a supremacy to belong to any school. Though he acknowledged a filial reverence for Spenser as a poet, he left no Gothic irregular tracery in the design of his own great work, but gave a classical harmony of parts to its stupendous pile. It thus resembles a dome, the vastness of which is at first sight concealed by its symmetry, but which expands more and more to the eye while it is contemplated. His early poetry seems to have neither disturbed nor corrected the bad taste of his age.—Comus came into the world unacknowledged by its author, and Lycidas appeared at first only with his initials. These, and other exquisite pieces, composed in the happiest years of his life, at his father's country-house at Horton, were collectively published, with his name affixed to them, in 1645; but that precious volume, which included *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, did not (I believe) come to a second edition, till it was republished by himself at the distance of eight-and-twenty years. Almost a century elapsed before his minor works obtained their proper fame.

'Even when *Paradise Lost* appeared, though it was not neglected, it attracted no crowd of imitators, and made no visible change in the poetical practice of the age. He stood alone, and aloof above his times, the bard of immortal subjects, and, as far as there is perpetuity in language, of immortal fame. The very choice of those subjects bespoke a contempt for any species of excellence that was attainable by other men. There is something that overawes the mind in conceiving his long deliberated selection of that theme—his attempting it when his eyes were shut upon the face of nature, his dependence, we might almost say, on supernatural inspiration, and in the calm air of strength with which he opens *Paradise Lost*, beginning a mighty performance without the appearance of an effort.

'The warlike part of *Paradise Lost* was inseparable from its subject. Whether it could have been differently managed, is a problem which our reverence for Milton will scarcely permit us to state. I feel that reverence too strongly to suggest even the possibility, that Milton could have improved his poem, by having thrown his angelic warfare into more remote perspective; but it seems to me to be most sublime when it is least distinctly brought home to the imagination. What an awful effect has the dim and undefined conception of the conflict, which we gather from the opening of the first book! There the veil of mystery is left undrawn between us and a subject, which the powers of description were inadequate to exhibit. The ministers of divine vengeance and pursuit had been recalled, the thunders had ceased

"To bellow through the vast and boundless deep," (in that line what an image of sound and space is conveyed!)—and our terrific conception of the past is deepened by its indistinctness. In optics there are some phenomena which are beautifully deceptive at a certain distance, but which lose their illusive charm on the slightest approach to them, that changes the light and position in which they are viewed. Something like this takes place in the phenomena of fancy. The array of the fallen angels in hell—the unfurling of the Standard of Satan—and the march of his troops

"In perfect phalanx, to the Dorian mood
"Of flutes and soft recorders"—

all this human pomp and circumstance of war—is magic and overwhelming illusion. The imagination is taken by surprise. But the noblest efforts of language are tried with very unequal effect to interest us, in the immediate and close view of the battle itself in the sixth book; and the martial demons who charmed us in the shades of hell, lose some portion of their sublimity, when their artillery is discharged in the day-light of heaven.

‘If we call diction the garb of thought, Milton, in his style, may be said to wear the costume of sovereignty. The idioms even of foreign languages contributed to adorn it. He was the most learned of poets; yet his learning interferes not with his substantial English purity. His simplicity is unimpaired by glowing ornament,—like the bush in the sacred flame, which burnt but “was not consumed.”

‘In delineating the blessed spirits Milton has exhausted all the conceivable variety that could be given to pictures of unshaded sanctity; but it is chiefly in those of the fallen angels that his excellence is conspicuous above every thing ancient or modern. Tasso had, indeed, portrayed an infernal council, and had given the hint to our poet of ascribing the origin of pagan worship to those reprobate spirits. But how poor and squalid in comparison of the Miltonic Pandæmonium are the Scyllas, the Cyclopes, and the Chimeras of an Infernal Council of the Jerusalem! Tasso’s conclave of fiends is a den of ugly incongruous monsters. The powers of Milton’s hell are godlike shapes and forms. Their appearance dwarfs every other poetical conception, when we turn our dilated eyes from contemplating them. It is not their external attributes alone which expand the imagination, but their souls, which are as colossal as their stature—their “thoughts that wander through eternity”—the pride that burns amidst the ruins of their divine natures, and their genius, that feels with the ardour, and debates with the eloquence of heaven.—pp. 242–247.

We have already said, that we think Shirley overpraised—but he is praised with great eloquence. There is but little said of Dryden in the Essay—but it is said with force and with judgement. In speaking of Pope and his contemporaries, Mr. C. touches on debatable ground: And we shall close our quotations from this part of his Work, with the passage in which he announces his own indulgent, and perhaps, latitudinarian opinions.

‘There are exclusionists in taste, who think that they cannot speak with sufficient disparagement of the English poets of the first part of the eighteenth century; and they are armed with a noble provocative to English contempt, when they have it to say, that those poets belong to a French school. Indeed Dryden himself is generally included in that school; though more genuine English is to be found in no man’s pages. But in poetry “there are many mansions.” I am free to confess, that I can pass from the elder writers, and still find a charm in the correct and equable sweetness of Parrell. Conscious that his diction has not the freedom and volubility of the better strains of the elder time, I cannot but remark his exemption from the quaintness and false metaphor which so often disfigure the style of the preceding age; nor deny my respect to the select choice of his expression, the clearness and keeping of his imagery, and the pensive dignity of his moral feeling.

‘Pope gave our heroic couplet its strictest melody and tersest expression.

D’un mot mis en sa place il enseigne le pouvoir.

If his contemporaries forgot other poets in admiring him, let him not be robbed of his just fame on pretence that a part of it was superfluous. The public ear was long fatigued with repetitions of his manners; but if we place ourselves in the situation of those to whom his brilliancy, succinctness, and animation were wholly new, we cannot wonder at their being captivated to the fondest admiration. In order to do justice to Pope, we should forget his imitators, if that were possible; but it is easier to remember than to forget by an effort; to acquire associations than to shake them off. Every one may recollect how often the most beautiful air has pulled upon his ear, and grown insipid, from being played or sung by vulgar musicians. It is the same thing with regard to Pope’s versification. That his peculiar rhythm and manner are the very best in the whole range of our poetry need not be asserted. He has a gracefully peculiar manner, though it is not calculated to be a universal one; and where, indeed, shall we find the style of poetry that could be pronounced an exclusive model for every composer? His pauses have little variety, and his phrases are too much weighed in the balance of antithesis. But let us look to the spirit that points his antithesis, and to the rapid precision of his thoughts, and we shall forgive him for being too antithetic and sententious. pp. 259–262.

And to this is subjoined a long argument, to show that Mr. Bowles is mistaken in supposing, that a poet should always draw his images from the works of nature, and not from those of art. We have no room at present for any discussion of the question; but we do not think it is quite fairly stated in the passage to which we have referred; and confess that we are rather inclined, on the whole, to adhere to the creed of Mr. Bowles.

Of the Specimens, which compose the body of the Work, we cannot pretend to give any account. They are themselves but tiny and slender fragments of the Works from which they are taken; and to abridge them further would be to reduce them to mere dust and rubbish. Besides, we are not called upon to review the poets of England for the last four hundred years,—but only their present editor and critic. In the little we have yet to say, therefore, we shall treat only of the merits of Mr. Campbell. His account of Hall and Chamberlayn, is what struck us most in his first volume—probably because neither of the writers whom he so judiciously praises, were formerly familiar to us. Hall, who was the founder of our satirical poetry, wrote his satires about the year 1597, when only twenty-three years old; and whether we consider the age of the man or of the world, they appear to us equally wonderful. In this extraordinary Work, “he discovered,” says Mr. C., “not only the early vigour of his own genius, but the power and pliability of his native tongue: for in the point, and volubility, and vigour of Hall’s numbers, we might frequently imagine our-

elves perusing Dryden.” This may be exemplified in the harmony and picturesque of the following description of a magnificent, rural mansion, which the traveller approaches in the hopes of reaching the seat of ancient hospitality, but finds it deserted by its selfish owner.

Beat the broad gates, a goodly hollow sound,
With double echoes, doth again rebound;
But not a dog doth bark to welcome thee;
Nor churlish porter canst thou chafing see.
All dumb and silent, like the dead of night,
Or dwelling of some sleepy Sybarite;
The marble pavement hid with desert weed,
With house leek, thistle, dock, and hemlock seed.

Look to the tow’red chimnies, which should be
The wind-pipes of good hospitality,
Through which it breatheth to the open air,
Betokening life and liberal welfare;
Lo, there th’ unthankful swallow takes her rest,
And fills the tunnel with her circled nest.

‘His satires are neither cramped by personal hostility, nor spun out to vague declamations on vice, but give us the form and pressure of the times exhibited in the faults of coeval literature, and in the foppish or sordid traits of prevailing manner. The age was undoubtedly fertile in eccentricity. II. pp. 257, 258.

What he says of Chamberlayn, and the extracts he has made from his Pharonnida, have made us quite impatient for an opportunity of perusing the whole poem.

The poetical merits of Ben Jonson, are chiefly discussed in the Essay; and the Notice is principally biographical. It is very pleasingly written, though with an affectionate leaning towards his hero. The following short passage affords a fair specimen of the good sense and good temper of all Mr. Campbell’s apologies.

The poet’s journey to Scotland (1617), awakens many pleasing recollections, when we conceive him anticipating his welcome among a people who might be proud of a share in his ancestry, and setting out, with manly strength, on a journey of 400 miles, on foot. We are assured, by one who saw him in Scotland, that he was treated with respect and affection among the nobility and gentry; nor was the romantic scenery of the country lost upon his fancy. From the poem which he meditated on Lochlomond, it is seen that he looked on it with a poet’s eye. But, unhappily, the meagre anecdotes of Drummond have made this event of his life too prominent, by the over-importance which have been attached to them. Drummond, a smooth and sober gentleman, seems to have disliked Jonson’s indulgence in that conviviality which Ben had shared with his Fletcher and Shakespeare at the Mermaid. In consequence of those anecdotes, Jonson’s memory has been damned for brutality, and Drummond’s for perfidy. Jonson drank freely at Hawthornden, and talked big—things neither incredible nor unpardonable. Drummond’s perfidy amounted to writing a letter, beginning Sir, with one very kind sentence in it, to the man whom he had described unfavourably in a private memorandum, which he never meant for publication. As to Drummond’s decoying Jonson under his roof with any premeditated design on his reputation, no one can seriously believe it. III. pp. 150, 151.

The following brief account of Andrew Marvell is worth extracting, for the spirit with which it is written—though, we think, Mr. Campbell does not do justice to the sweetness and tenderness which characterize the poetry as it did the private life, of this inflexible patriot.

‘A better edition of Marvell’s works than any that has been given, is due to his literary and patriotic character. He was the champion of Milton’s living reputation, and the victorious supporter of free principles against Bishop Parker, when that venal apostate to bigotry promulgated, in his Ecclesiastical Polity, “that it was more necessary to set a severe government over men’s consciences and religious persuasions, than over their vices and immoralities.” The humour and eloquence of Marvell’s prose tracts were admired, and probably imitated by Swift. In playful exuberance of figure he sometimes resembles Burke. For consistency of principles it is not so easy to find his parallel. His few poetical pieces betray some adherence to the school of conceit; but there is much in it that comes from the heart, warm, pure, and affectionate.

‘He sat in the Parliament of 1660, as one of the representatives of the city of Hull, and was re-elected as long as he lived. At the beginning of the reign indeed, we find him absent for two years in Germany and Holland; and on his return, having sought leave from his constituents, he accompanied Lord Carlisle as ambassador’s secretary to the Northern Courts: but from the year 1665 till his death, his attendance in the House of Commons was uninterrupted, and exhibits a zeal in parliamentary duty that was never surpassed. Constantly corresponding with his constituents, he was at once earnest for their public rights and for their local interests. After the most fatiguing attendances, it was his practice to send them a minute statement of public proceedings, before he took either sleep or refreshment. Though he rarely spoke, his influence in both Houses was so considerable, that when Prince Rupert (who often consulted him,) voted on the popular side, it used to be said, that the prince had been with his tutor. He was one of the last members who received the legitimate stipend for attendance; and his grateful constituents would often send him a barrel of ale as a token of their regard. The traits that are recorded of his public spirit and simple manners, give an air of probability to the popular story of his refusal of a court bribe. Charles the Second having met with Marvell in a private company, found his manners so agreeable, that he could not imagine a man of such complacency to possess inflexible honesty: He accordingly, as it is said, sent his lord treasurer, Danby, to him next day, who, after mounting several dark staircases, found the author in a very mean lodging, and proffered him a mark of his Majesty’s consideration. Marvell assured the lord-treasurer, that he was not in want of the King’s assistance; and humorously illustrated his independence, by calling his servant to witness, that he had dined for three day success-

sively on a shoulder of mutton; and having given a dignified and rational explanation of his motives to the minister, went to a friend and borrowed a guinea. The story of his death having been occasioned by poisoning, it is to be hoped was but a party fable. It is certain, however, that he had been threatened with assassination. The corporation of Hull voted a sum for his funeral expenses, and for an appropriate monument. pp. 193-196.

The notice of Cotton may be quoted, as a perfect model for such slight memorials of writers of the middle order.

There is a careless and happy humour in this poet's *Voyage to Ireland*, which seems to anticipate the manner of Anstey, in the *Bath Guide*. The tasteless indelicacy of his parody of the *Æneid*, has found but too many admirers. His imitations of Lucian betray the grossest misconception of humorous effect, when he attempts to burlesque that which is ludicrous already. He was acquainted with French and Italian; and among several works from the former language, translated the *Horace* of Corneille, and *Montaigne's Essays*.

The father of Cotton is described by Lord Clarendon as an accomplished and honourable man, who was driven by domestic afflictions to habits which rendered his age less revered than his youth, and made his best friends wish that he had not lived so long. From him our poet inherited an incumbered estate, with disposition to extravagance little calculated to improve it. After having studied at Cambridge, and returned from his travels abroad, he married the daughter of Sir Thomas Owithorp, in Nottinghamshire. He went to Ireland as a captain in the army; but of his military progress nothing is recorded. Having embraced the soldier's life merely as a shift in distress, he was not likely to pursue it with much ambition. It was probably in Ireland that he met with his second wife, Mary, Countess-Dowager of Ardglass, the widow of Lord Cornwall. She had a jointure of 1500*l.* a year, secured from his imprudent management. He died insolvent, at Westminster. One of his favourite recreations was angling; and his house, which was situated on the Dove, a fine trout stream which divides the counties of Derby and Stafford, was the frequent resort of his friend Isaac Walton. There he built a fishing boscage, "*Piscatoribus sacrum*," with the initials of honest Isaac's name and his own united in ciphers over the door. The walls were painted with fishing-scenes, and the portraits of Cotton and Walton were upon the beaufet. pp. 293, 294.

There is a very beautiful and affectionate account of Parnell.—But there is more power of writing, and more depth and delicacy of feeling, in the following masterly account and estimate of Lillo.

George Lillo was the son of a Dutch jeweller, who married an English woman, and settled in London. Our poet was born near Moorfields, was bred to his father's business, and followed it for many years. The story of his dying in distress, was a fiction of Hammond, the poet; for he bequeathed a considerable property to his nephew, whom he made his heir. It has been said, that this bequest was in consequence of his finding the young man disposed to lend him a sum of money at a time when he thought proper to feign pecuniary distress, in order that he might discover the sincerity of those calling themselves his friends. Thomas Davies, his biographer and editor, professes to have got this anecdote from a surviving partner of Lillo. It bears, however an intrinsic air of improbability. It is not usual for sensible tradesmen to affect being on the verge of bankruptcy; and Lillo's character was that of an uncommonly sensible man. Fielding, his intimate friend, ascribes to him a manly simplicity of mind, that is extremely unlike such a stratagem.

Lillo is the tragic poet of middling and familiar life. Instead of heroes from romance and history, he gives the merchant and his apprentice; and the Macbeth of his "*Fatal Curiosity*," is a private gentleman, who has been reduced by his poverty to dispose of his copy of Seneca for a morsel of bread. The mind will be apt, after reading his Works, to suggest to itself the question, how far the graver drama would gain or lose by a more general adoption of this plebeian principle. The cares, it may be said, that are most familiar to our existence, and the distresses of those nearest to ourselves in situation, ought to lay the strongest hold upon our sympathies; and the general mass of society ought to furnish a more express image of man than any detached or elevated portion of the species.

Lillo is certainly a master of potent effect in the exhibition of human suffering. His representation of actual or intended murder, seems to assume a deeper terror, from the familiar circumstances of life with which it is invested. Such, indeed, is said to have been the effect of a scene in his "*Arden of Feversham*," that the audience rose up with one accord and interrupted it. The anecdote, whether true or false, must recal to the mind of every one who has perused that piece, the harrowing sympathy which it is calculated to excite. But, notwithstanding the power of Lillo's Works, we entirely miss in them that romantic attraction which invites to repeated perusal of them. They give us life in a close and dreadful semblance of reality, but not arrayed in the magic illusion of poetry. His strength lies in conception of situations, not in beauty of dialogue, or in the eloquence of the passions. Yet the effect of his plain and homely subjects, was so strikingly superior to that of the rapid and heroic productions of the day, as to induce some of his contemporary admirers to pronounce, that he had reached the acme of dramatic excellence, and struck into the best and most genuine path of tragedy. George Barnwell, it was observed, drew more tears than the rants of Alexander. This might be true, but it did not bring the comparison of humble and heroic subjects to a fair test; for the tragedy of Alexander is bad, not from its subject, but from the incapacity of the poet who composed it. It does not prove that heroes, drawn from history or romance, are not at least as susceptible of high and poetical effect, as a wicked apprentice, or a distressed gentleman pawning his moveables. It is one question whether Lillo has given to his subjects from private life, the degree of beauty of which they are susceptible. He is a master of terrific, but not of tender impressions. We feel a harshness and gloom in his genius, even while we are compelled to admire its force and originality.

The peculiar choice of his subjects was happy and commendable, as far as is regarded himself; for his talents never succeeded so well when he ventured out of them. But it is another question, whether the familiar cast of those subjects was fitted to constitute a more genuine, or only a subordinate walk in tragedy. Undoubtedly the genuine delineation of the human heart will please us, from whatever station or circumstances of life it is derived. In the simple pathos of tragedy, probably very little difference will be felt from the choice of characters being pitched above or below the line of mediocrity in station. But something more

than pathos is required in tragedy; and the very pain that attends our sympathy, requires agreeable and romantic associations of the fancy to be blended with its poignancy. Whatever attaches ideas of importance, publicity, and elevation to the object of pity, forms a brightening and alluring medium to the imagination. Athens herself, with all her simplicity and democracy, delighted on the stage to—

"let gorgeous Tragedy
"In scepter'd pall come sweeping by."

Even situations far depressed beneath the familiar mediocrity of life, are more picturesque and poetical than its ordinary level. It is certainly on the virtues of the middling rank of life, that the strength and comforts of society chiefly depend, in the same way as we look for the harvest, not on cliffs and precipices, but on the easy slope and the uniform plain. But the printer does not in general fix on level countries for the subjects of his noble landscapes. There is an analogy, I conceive, to this in the mortal painting of tragedy. Disparities of station give it boldness of outline. The commanding situations of life are its mountain scenery; the region where its storm and sunshine may be portrayed in their strongest contrast and colouring. V. pp. 58—62.

Nothing, we think, can be more exquisite than this criticism,—though we are far from being entire converts to its doctrines; and are moreover of opinion, that the merits of Lillo, as a poet at least, are considerably overrated. There is a fatness and a weakness in his diction, that we think must have struck Mr. C. more than he has acknowledged,—and a tone, occasionally, both of vulgarity and of paltry affectation, that counteracts the pathetic effect of his conceptions, and does injustice to the experiment of domestic tragedy.

The critique on Thomson is distinguished by the same fine tact, candour, and conciseness.

Mr. Twining, the translator of Aristotle's *Poetics*, attributes the absence of poetry devoted to pure rural and picturesque description among the ancients, to the absence or imperfection of the art of landscape painting. The Greeks, he observes, had no Thomsons because they had no Claudes. Undoubtedly they were not blind to the beauties of natural scenery; but their descriptions of rural objects are almost always what may be called sensual descriptions, exhibiting circumstances of corporeal delight, such as breezes to fan the body, springs to cool the feet, grass to repose the limbs, or fruits to regale the taste and smell, rather than objects of contemplative pleasure to the eye and imagination. From the time of Augustus, when, according to Pliny, landscape painting was first cultivated, picturesque images and descriptions of prospects seem to have become more common. But on the whole there is much more studied and detailed description in modern than in ancient poetry. There is besides in Thomson a pure theism, and a spirit of philanthropy, which, though not unknown to classic antiquity, was not familiar to its popular breast. The religion of the ancients was beautiful in fiction, but not in sentiment. It had revealed the most voluptuous and terrific agencies to poetry, but had not taught her to contemplate nature as one great image of Divine benignity, or her creatures as the objects of comprehensive human sympathy. Before popular poetry could assume this character, Christianity, philosophy, and freedom, must have civilized the human mind.

Habits of early admiration teach us all to look back upon this poet as the favourite companion of our solitary walks, and as the author who has first or chiefly reflected back to our minds a heightened and refined sensation of the delight which rural scenery affords us. The judgment of cooler years may somewhat abate our estimation of him, though it will still leave us the essential features of his poetical character to abide the test of reflection. The unvaried pomp of his diction suggests a most unfavorable comparison with the manly and idiomatic simplicity of Cowper; at the same time, the pervading spirit and feeling of his poetry is in general more bland and delightful than that of his great rival in rural description. Thomson seems to contemplate the creation with an eye of unqualified pleasure and ecstasy, and to love its inhabitants with a lofty and hallowed feeling of religious happiness; Cowper has also his philanthropy, but it is dashed with religious terrors, and with themes of satire, regret, and reprehension. Cowper's image of nature is more curiously distinct and familiar. Thomson carries our associations through a wider circuit of speculation and sympathy. His touches cannot be more faithful than Cowper's, but they are more soft and select, and less disturbed by the intrusion of homely objects. It is but justice to say, that amidst the feeling and fancy of the Seasons, we meet with interruptions of declamation, heavy narrative, and unhappy digression—with pathetic eloquence that throws a counterfeit glow of expression on common-place ideas—as when he treats us to the solemnly ridiculous bathing of Musidora; or draws from the classics instead of nature; or, after invoking Inspiration from her hermit seat, makes his dedicatory bow to a patronizing countess, or speaker of the House of Commons. As long as he dwells in the pure contemplation of nature, and the appeals to the universal poetry of the human breast, his redundant style comes to us as something venial and adventitious—it is the flowing vesture of the druid; and perhaps to the general experience is rather imposing; but when he returns to the familiar narrations or courtesies of life, the same diction ceases to seem the mantle of inspiration, and only strikes us by its unwieldy difference from the common costume of expression. pp. 215-218.

There is the same delicacy of taste, and beauty of writing, in the following remarks on Collins—though we think the *Specimens afterwards* given from this exquisite poet are rather niggardly.

Collins published his *Oriental eclogues* while at college, and his *lyrical poetry* at the age of twenty-six. Those works will abide comparison with whatever Milton wrote under the age of thirty. If they have rather less exuberant wealth of genius, they exhibit more exquisite touches of pathos. Like Milton, he leads us into the haunted ground of imagination; like him, he has the rich economy of expression hallowed with thought, which by single or few words often hints entire pictures to the imagination. In what short and simple terms, for instance, does he open a wide and majestic landscape to the mind, such as we might view from Benlomond or Snowden, when he speaks of the hut

"That from some mountain's side
Views wilds and swelling floods."

And in the line 'Where faint and sickly winds for ever howl around,' he does not merely seem to describe the sultry desert, but brings it home to the senses.

A cloud of obscurity sometimes rests on his highest conceptions, arising from the fineness of his associations, and the daring sweep of his allusions; but the shadow is transitory, and interferes very little with the light of his imagery, or the warmth of his feelings. The absence of even this speck of mysticism from his Ode on the Passions is perhaps the happy circumstance, that secured its unbounded popularity. Nothing is common-place in Collins. The pastoral eclogue, which is insipid in all other English hands, assumes in his, a touching interest, and a picturesque air of novelty. It seems, that he himself ultimately undervalued those eclogues, as deficient in characteristic manners; but surely no just reader of them cares any more about this circumstance than about the authenticity of the tale of Troy.

In his Ode to Fear he hints at his dramatic ambition, and he planned several tragedies. Had he lived to enjoy and adorn existence, it is not easy to conceive his sensitive spirit and harmonious ear descending to mediocrity in any path of poetry; yet it may be doubted if his mind had not a passion for the visionary and remote forms of imagination too strong and exclusive for the general purposes of the drama. His genius loved to breathe rather in the preternatural and ideal element of poetry, than in the atmosphere of imitation, which lies closest to real life; and his notions of poetical excellence, whatever vows he might address to the manners, were still tending to the vast, the undefinable, and the abstract. Certainly, however, he carried sensibility and tenderness into the highest regions of abstracted thought: his enthusiasm spreads a glow even amongst 'the shadowy tribes of mind,' and his allegory is as sensible to the heart as it is visible to the fancy.' pp. 310-312.

Though we are afraid our extracts are becoming unreasonable, we cannot resist indulging our nationality, by producing this specimen of Mr. Campbell's.

The admirers of the Gentle Shepherd must perhaps be contented to share some suspicion of national partiality, while they do justice to their own feeling of its merit. Yet as this drama is a picture of rustic Scotland, it would perhaps be saying little for its fidelity, if it yielded no more agreeableness to the breast of a native, than he could expound to a stranger by the strict letter of criticism. We should think the painter had finished the likeness of a mother very indifferently, if it did not bring home to her children traits of undefinable expression which had escaped every eye but that of familiar affection. Ramsay had not the force of Burns, but, neither, in just proportion to his merits, is he likely to be felt by an English reader. The fire of Burns's wit and passion glows through an obscure dialect by its confinement to short and contracted bursts. The interest which Ramsay excites is spread over a long poem, delineating manners more than passions, and the mind must be at home both in the language and manners, to appreciate the skill and comic archness with which he has heightened the display of rustic character without giving it vulgarity, and refined the view of peasant life by situation of sweetness and tenderness, without departing in the least degree from its simplicity. The Gentle Shepherd stands quite apart from the general pastoral poetry of modern Europe. It has no satyrs, nor featureless simpletons, nor drowsy and still landscapes of nature, but distinct characters and amusing incidents. The principal shepherd never speaks out of consistency with the habits of a peasant, but he moves in that sphere with such a manly spirit, with so much cheerful sensibility to its humble joys with maxims of life so rational and independent, and with an ascendancy over his fellow swains so well maintained by his force of character, that if we could suppose the pacific scenes of the drama to be suddenly changed into situations of trouble and danger, we should, in exact consistency with our former idea of him expect him to become the leader of the peasants and the Tell of his native hamlet. Nor is the character of his mistress less beautifully conceived. She is represented, like himself, as elevated, by a fortunate discovery, from obscure to opulent life, yet as equally capable of being the ornament of either. A Richardson or a D'Arby, had they continued her history, might have heightened the portrait, but they would not have altered its outline. Like the poetry of Tasso and Ariosto, that of the Gentle Shepherd is engraven on the memory of its native country. Its verses have passed into proverbs, and it continues to be the delight and solace of the peasantry whom it describes.' pp. 344-346.

We think the merits of *Akenside* underrated, and those of Churchill exaggerated; but we have no passage in which the amiable but equitable and reasonable indulgence of Mr. Campbell's mind, is so conspicuous as in his account of Chatterton—and it is no slight thing for a poet to have kept himself cool and temperate, on a theme which has hurried so many inferior spirits into passion and extravagance.

'When we conceive,' says Mr. C. 'the inspired boy transporting himself in imagination back to the days of his fictitious Rowley, embodying his ideal character, and giving to airy nothing a local habitation and a name,' we may forget the impostor in the enthusiast, and forgive the falsehood of his reverie for its beauty and ingenuity. One of his companions has described the air of rapture and inspiration with which he used to repeat his passages from Rowley, and the delight which he took to contemplate the church of St. Mary Redcliffe, while it awoke the associations of antiquity in his romantic mind. There was one spot in particular, full in view of the church where he would often lay himself down, and fix his eyes, as it were, in a trance. On Sundays, as long as daylight lasted, he would walk alone in the country around Bristol, taking drawings of churches, or other objects that struck his imagination.

'During the few months for his existence in London, his letters to his mother and sister, which here always accompanied with presents expressed the most joyous anticipations. But suddenly all the flush of his gay hopes and busy projects terminated in despair. The particular causes which led to his catastrophe have not been distinctly traced. His own descriptions of his prospects were but little to be trusted; for while apparently exchanging his shadowy visions of Rowley for the real adventures of life, he was still moving under the spell of an imagination that saw every thing in exaggerated colours. Out of this dream he was at length awakened, when he found, that he had miscalculated the chances of patronage, and the profits of literary labour.

'The heart which can peruse the fate of Chatterton without being moved, is little to be envied for its tranquillity; but the intellects of those men must be as deficient as their hearts are uncharitable, who confounding all shades of moral distinction, have ranked his literary fiction of Rowley in the same class of crimes with pecuniary forgery, and have calculated, that if he had not died by his own hand he would have probably ended his days upon a gallows. This disgusting sentence has been pronounced upon a youth who was exemplary for severe study, temperance, and natural affection. His Rowleyan forgery must indeed be pronounced improper by the general law which condemns all falsifications of history; but it deprived no man of his fame, it had no sacrilegious interference with the memory of departed genius, it had not, like Lauder's imposture, any malignant motive, to rob a party or a country, of a name which was its pride and ornament.

'Setting aside the opinion of those uncharitable biographers, whose imaginations have conducted him to the gibbet, it may be owned, that his unformed character exhibited strong and conflicting elements of good and evil. Even the momentary project of the infidel boy to become a methodist preacher, betrays an obliquity of design, and a contempt of human credulity that is not very amiable. But had he been spared, his pride and ambition would have come to flow in their proper channels; his understanding would have taught him the practical value of truth and the dignity of virtue, and he would have despised artifice, when he had felt the strength and security of wisdom. In estimating the promises of his genius, I would rather lean to the utmost enthusiasm of his admirers, than to the cold opinion of those, who are afraid of being blinded to the defects of the poems attributed to Rowley, by the veil of obsolete phraseology which is thrown over them.

'The inequality of Chatterton's various productions may be compared to the disproportions of the ungrown giant. His works had nothing of the definite neatness of that precocious talent which stops short in early maturity. His thirst for knowledge was that of a being taught by instinct to lay up materials for the exercise of great and undeveloped powers. Even in his favourite maxim, pushed it might be to hyperbole, that a man by abstinence and perseverance might accomplish whatever he pleased, may be traced the indications of a genius which nature had meant to achieve works of immortality. Tasso alone can be compared to him as a juvenile prodigy. No English poet ever equalled him at the same age.' V.F. pp. 156-162.

The account of Gray is excellent, and that of Goldsmith delightful. We can afford to give but an inconsiderable part of it.

'Goldsmith's poetry enjoys a calm and steady popularity. It inspires us, indeed, with no admiration of daring design, or of fertile invention; but it presents, within its narrow limits, a distinct and unbroken view of poetical delightfulness. His descriptions and sentiments have the pure zest of nature. He is refined without false delicacy, and correct without insipidity. Perhaps there is an intellectual composure in his manner, which may, in some passages, be said to approach to the reserved and prosaic; but he unbends from this graver strain of reflection, to tenderness, and even to playfulness, with an ease and grace almost exclusively his own; and connects extensive views of the happiness and interests of society, with pictures of life, that touch the heart by their familiarity. His language is certainly simple, though it is not cast in rugged or careless mould. He is no disciple of the gaunt and famished school of simplicity. Deliberately as he wrote, he cannot be accused of wanting natural and idiomatic expression; but still it is select and refined expression. He uses the ornaments which must always distinguish true poetry from prose; and when he adopts colloquial plainness, it is with the utmost care and skill, to avoid a vulgar humility. There is more of this sustained simplicity, of this chaste economy and choice of words in Goldsmith, than in any modern poet, or perhaps than would be attainable or desirable as a standard for every writer of rhyme. In extensive narrative poems such a style would be too difficult. There is a noble propriety even in the careless strength of great poems as in the roughness of castle walls; and, generally speaking where there is a long course of story, or observation of life to be pursued, such exquisite touches as those of Goldsmith would be too costly materials for sustaining it. The tendency towards abstracted observation in his poetry agrees peculiarly with the compendious form of expression which he studied; whilst the homeliest joys, on which his fancy loved to repose, required at once the chastest and sweetest colours of language, to make them harmonize with the dignity of a philosophical poem. His whole manner has a still depth of feeling and reflection, which gives back the image of nature unruffled and minutely. He has no redundant thoughts, or false transports; but seems, on every occasion, to have weighed the impulse to which he surrendered himself. Whatever ardour or casual felicities he may have thus sacrificed, he gained a high degree of purity and self-possession. His chaste pathos makes him an insinuating moralist, and throws a charm of Claude-like softness over his descriptions of homely objects, that would seem only fit to be the subjects of Dutch painting. But his quiet enthusiasm leads the affections to humble things without a vulgar association; and he inspires us with a fondness to trace the simplest recollections of Auburn, till we count the furniture of its ale house, and listen to the "vanishing clock that clicked behind the door." pp. 261-263.

'Although Goldsmith has not examined all the points and bearings of the question suggested by the changes in society which were passing before his eyes, he has strongly and affectingly pointed out the immediate evils with which those changes were pregnant. Nor while the picture of Auburn delights the fancy, does it make an useless appeal to our moral sentiments. It may be well sometimes that society, in the very pride and triumph of its improvement, should be taught to pause and look back upon its former steps; to count the virtues that have been lost, or the victims that have been sacrificed by its changes. Whatever may be the calculations of the political economist as to ultimate effects, the circumstance of agricultural wealth being thrown into large masses, and of the small farmer exiled from his scanty domain, foreboded a baleful influence on the independent character of the peasantry, which it is by no means clear that subsequent events have proved to be either slight or imaginary.' pp. 266, 267.

There is too much of William Whitehead, and almost too much of Richard Glover, and a great deal too much of Amhurst, Selden, Brampton and Meston. Indeed the *nequid nimis* seems to have been more forgotten by the learned editor in the last, than in any of the other volumes. Yet there is by no means too much of Burns, or Cowper, or even of the Wartons. The abstract of Barrow's life is beautiful, and we are most willing to acknowledge

the defence of the poet, against some of the severities of this Journal, is substantially successful. No one who reads all that we have written of Burns, will doubt of the sincerity of our admiration for his genius, or of the depth of our veneration and sympathy for his lofty character and his untimely fate. We still think he had a vulgar taste in letter-writing, and too frequently patronized the belief of a connexion between licentious indulgences and generosity of character. But, on looking back on what we have said on these subjects, we are sensible that we have expressed ourselves with too much bitterness, and made the words of our censure far more comprehensive than our meaning. A certain tone of exaggeration is incident, we fear to the sort of writing in which we are engaged. Reckoning a little too much, perhaps, on the dulness of our readers, we are often led, unconsciously, to overstate our sentiments, in order to make them understood; and where a little controversial warmth is added to a little love of effect, and excess of colouring is apt to steal over the canvas which ultimately offends no eye so much as our own. We gladly make this expiation to the shade of our illustrious countryman.

In his observations on Joseph Warton, Mr. C. resumes the controversy about the poetical character of Pope, upon which he had entered at the close of his Essay; and as to which we hope to have some other opportunity of giving our opinions. At present, however, we must hasten to a conclusion; and shall make our last extracts from the notice of Cowper, which is drawn up on somewhat of a larger scale than any other in the Work. The abstract of his life is given with great tenderness and beauty, and with considerable fullness of detail. But the remarks on his poetry are the most precious,—and are all that we have now room to borrow.

The nature of Cowper's Works makes us peculiarly identify the poet and the man in pursuing them. As an individual, he was retired and weaned from the vanities of the world; and, as an original writer, he left the ambitious and luxurious subjects of fiction and passion, for those of real life and simple nature, and for the development of his own earnest feelings, in behalf of moral and religious truth. His language has such a masculine idiomatic strength, and his manner, whether he rises into grace or falls into negligence, has so much plain and familiar freedom, that we read no poetry with a deeper conviction of its sentiments having come from the author's heart; and of the enthusiasm, in whatever he describes, having been unfeigned and unexaggerated. He impresses us with the idea of a being, whose fine spirit had been long enough in the mixed society of the world to be polished by its intercourse, and yet withdrawn as soon as to retain an unworlly degree of purity and simplicity. He was advanced in years before he became an author; but his compositions display a tenderness of feeling so youthfully preserved, and even a vein of humour so far from being extinguished by his ascetic habits, that we can scarcely regret his not having written them at an earlier period of life. For he blends the determination of age with an exquisite and ingenuous sensibility; and though he sports very much with his subjects, yet when he is in earnest, there is a gravity of long-felt conviction in his sentiments, which gives an uncommon ripeness of character to his poetry.

It is due to Cowper to fix our regard on this unaffectedness and authenticity of his Works, considered as representations of himself, because he forms a striking instance of genius writing the history of its own secluded feelings, reflections, and enjoyments, in a shape so interesting as to engage the imagination like a work of fiction. He has invented no character in fable, nor in the drama; but he has left a record of his own character, which forms not only an object of deep sympathy, but a subject for the study of human nature. His verse, it is true, considered as such a record, abounds with opposite traits of severity and gentleness, of playfulness and superstition, of solemnity and mirth, which appear almost anomalous; and there is, undoubtedly, sometimes an air of moody versatility in the extreme contrasts of his feelings. But looking to his poetry as an entire structure, it has a passive air of sincerity. It is founded in steadfast principles of belief; and, if we may prolong the architectural metaphor, though its arches may be sometimes gloomy, its tracery sportive, and its lights and shadows grotesquely crossed, yet altogether it still forms a vast, various, and interesting monument of the builder's mind. Young's works are as devout, as satirical, sometimes as merry as those of Cowper; and, undoubtedly, more witty. But the melancholy and wit of Young do not make up to us the idea of a conceivable or natural being. He has sketched in his pages the ingenious, but incongruous form of a fictitious mind; Cowper's soul speaks from his volumes.

Considering the tenor and circumstances of his life, it is not much to be wondered at, that some asperities and peculiarities should have adhered to the strong stem of his genius, like the moss and fungus that cling to some noble oak of the forest, amidst the damps of its unassumed retirement. It is more surprising that he preserved, in such seclusion, so much genuine power of comic observation. Though he himself acknowledged having written "many things with bile" in his first volume, yet his satire has many legitimate objects: and it is not abstracted and declamatory satire; but it places human manners before us in the liveliest attitudes and clearest colours. There is much of the full distinctness of Theophrastus, and of the nervous and concise spirit of La Bruyere, in his piece entitled "Conversation," with a cast of humour superadded, which is peculiarly English, and not to be found out of England. VII. pp. 357, 358.

Of his greatest work, *The Task*, he afterwards observes,

"His whimsical outset in a work, where he promises so little and performs so much, may even be advantageously contrasted with those magnificent commencements of poems, which pledge both the reader and the writer, in good earnest, to a task. Cowper's poem, on the contrary, is like a river, which rises from a playful little fountain, and which gather's beauty and magnitude as it proceeds. He leads us abroad into his daily walks; he exhibits the landscapes which he was accustomed to contemplate, and the trains of thought in which he habitually indulged. No attempt is made to interest us in legendary fictions, or historical recollections connected with the ground over which he expatiates; all is plainness and reality:

But we instantly recognise the true poet, in the clearness, sweetness, and fidelity of his scenic draughts; in his power of giving novelty to what is common; and in the high relish, the exquisite enjoyment of rural sights and sounds, which he communicates to the spirit. "His eyes drink the rivers with delight." He excites an idea, that almost amounts to sensation, of the freshness and delight of a rural walk, even when he leads us to the wasteful common, which

— "overgrown with fern, and rough
"With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deform'd,
"And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,
"And decks itself with ornaments of gold,
"Yields no unpleasant ramble; there the turf
"Smells fresh, and, rich in odouriferous herbs
"And fungous fruits of earth, regales the nose
"With luxuries of unexpected sweets."

"His rural prospects have far less variety and compass than those of Thomson; but his graphic touches are more close and minute: not that Thomson was either deficient or undelightful in circumstantial traits of the beauty of nature, but he looked to her as a whole more than Cowper. His genius was more extensive and philosophical. The poet of Olney, on the contrary, regarded human philosophy with something of theological contempt. To his eye, the great and little things of this world were levelled into an equality, by his recollection of the power and purposes of him who made them. They are, in his view, only as toys spread on the lap and carpet of nature, for the childhood of our immortal being. This religious indifference to the world, is far, indeed, from blunting his sensibility to the genuine and simple beauties of creation; but it gives his taste a contentment and fellowship with humble things. It makes him careless of selecting and refining his views of nature beyond their casual appearance. He contemplated the face of plain rural English life, in moments of leisure and sensibility, till its minutest features were impressed upon his fancy; and he sought not to embellish what he loved. Hence his landscapes have less of the ideally beautiful than Thomson's; but they have an unrivalled charm of truth and reality.

"He is one of the few poets, who have indulged neither in descriptions nor acknowledgments of the passion of love; but there is no poet who has given us a finer conception of the amenity of female influence. Of all the verses that have been ever devoted to the subject of domestic happiness, those in his winter evening at the opening of the fourth book of the *Task*, are perhaps the most beautiful. In pursuing that scene of "intimate delights," "fireside enjoyments," and "home-born happiness," we seem to recover a part of the forgotten value of existence, when we recognise the means of its blessedness so widely dispensed and so cheaply attainable, and find them susceptible of description at once so enchanting and so faithful.

"Though the scenes of 'The Task' are laid in retirement, the poem affords an amusing perspective of human affairs. Remote as the poet was from the stir of the great Babel, from the "*confuse sonus Urbis et illatibile murmur*," he glanced at most of the subjects of public interest which engaged the attention of his contemporaries. On those subjects, it is but faint praise to say, that he espoused the side of justice and humanity. Abundance of mediocrity of talent is to be found on the same side, rather injuring than promoting the cause, by its officious declamation. But nothing can be further from the stale commonplace and eucokoism of sentiment, than the philanthropic eloquence of Cowper—he speaks "like one having authority." Society is his debtor. Poetical expositions of the horrors of slavery may, indeed, seem very unlikely agents in contributing to destroy it; and it is possible, that the most refined planter in the west Indies, may look with neither shame nor compunction, on his own image in the pages of Cowper, exposed as a being degraded by giving stripes and tasks to his fellow-creature. But such appeals to the heart of the community are not lost. They fix themselves silently in the popular memory; and they become, at last, a part of that public opinion, which must, sooner or later, wrench the lash from the hand of the oppressor." pp. 359—364.

But we must now break away at once from this delightful occupation; and take our final farewell of a Work, in which, what is original, is scarcely less valuable than what is republished, and in which the genius of a living Poet has shed a fresh grace over the fading glories of so many of his departed brothers. We wish somebody would continue the work, by furnishing us with Specimens of our Living Poets. It would be more difficult, to be sure, and more dangerous; but, in some respects, it would also be more useful. The beauties of the unequal and voluminous writers, would be more conspicuous in a selection; and the different styles and schools of poetry would be brought into fairer, and nearer terms of comparison by the mere juxtaposition of their best productions; while a better and clearer view would be obtained, both of the general progress and apparent tendencies of the art, than can easily be gathered from the separate study of each important production. The mind of the critic, too, would be at once enlightened and tranquillized by the very greatness of the horizon thus subjected to his survey; and he would probably regard, both with less enthusiasm and less offence those contrasted and compensating beauties and defects, when presented together, and as it were in combination, than he can ever do, when they come upon him in distinct masses, and without the relief and softening of so varied an assemblage. On the other hand, it cannot be dissembled, that such a Work would be very trying to the unhappy editor's prophetic reputation, as well as to his impartiality and temper; and would, at all events, subject him to the most furious imputations of unfairness and malignity. In point of courage and candour, we do not know anybody who would do it better than ourselves: And if Mr. Campbell could only impart to us a fair share of his elegance, his fine perceptions, and his conciseness, we should like nothing better than to strapend these periodical lucubrations and furnish out a gallery of living bards, to match this exhibition of the departed.